JOURNAL OF

Islam in Asia

A Refereed International Biannual Arabic – English Journal

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

إنما يخشى الله من عباده العلماء

Journal of Islam in Asia

Articles submitted for publication in the *Journal of Islam in Asia* are subject to a process of peer review, in accordance with the normal academic practice.

Avoiding *Laghw* (Nonsense, Vain Talk, Vain Actions): An Initial Contribution to the Use of Islamic Concepts in Human Sciences

Mengelakkan Laghw (Tidak Masuk Akal, Perbincangan Kosong, Tindakan Tidak Baik): Sumbangan Awal Penggunaan Konsep Islam dalam Sains Manusia

Claudia Seise[*]

It was during one of my classes teaching 'Islamic Worldview, Knowledge and Civilization' at the International Islamic University Malaysia that I also had to talk about how to include Islamic concepts into human sciences. Including Islamic concepts into human sciences is referred to as integration of knowledge and one of the methodologies to contribute to epistemology as understood and developed by different contemporary Muslim scholars closely related to the International Islamic University Malaysia (Bakar 2014; Al-Attas 1999; and others). Integrating Islamic concepts into human sciences as a form of enriching human sciences with religious wisdom and values forms an approach to return knowledge to the realm of values. Here, integration of knowledge differs slightly to what has been referred to as the Islamization of human knowledge as developed by Kamal Hassan, the former rector and emirate Professor of IIUM. This method aims to 'purify' human knowledge from non-Islamic influences or traits that are not in line with the Islamic worldview (Berghout 2009; Berghout 2017; Abu Sulayman 2011). Enrichment with relevant references or concepts from Qur'an and Sunnah forms the second important element used in Hassan's method. However,

[*] Assist. Professor, Department of Fundamental and inter-Disciplinary studies, Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, IIUM, claudiaseise@iium.edu.my; claudia@seise.de.

both methods aim to de-secularize human sciences and (re)-connect knowledge and Islam.

Back to the classroom. Elaborating on the theoretical framework, I saw blank faces in front of me, not being able to make sense of it at all. I tried to give them examples to illustrate how we can use Islamic concepts to enrich human sciences. One example that I have used since is the Islamic idea of avoiding *laghw*. *Laghw* is mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah al-Waqi'ah (56), Verse 25. It is said that the inhabitants of paradise will not hear *laghw* but, the Surah continues, only "peace, peace" (*Salāman, Salāman*). Therefore, the absence of *laghw* is a characteristic of paradise and of the inhabitants therein. In Surah al-Mu'minūn (23), Verse 3, leaving *laghw* is mentioned as one of the characteristics of the successful believer: those will be successful who turn away from *laghw*. And in Surah al-Furqān (25), Verse 72 and the following verses, Almighty Allah states that those who pass by *laghw* with dignity, among doing other good things and having other positive characteristics, will be rewarded a high place in paradise.

Al-Mughira related: I heard the Prophet saying, "Allah has hated for you three things: 1. vain talks, (useless talk) that you talk too much or about others. 2. Wasting of wealth (by extravagance) 3. And asking too many questions (in disputed religious matters) or asking others for something (except in great need). (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, No. 591, Vol. Ill) Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "Fasting is not merely abstaining from food and drink alone. Rather, it is from lies, falsehood, vain talk, and swearing." (*Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah*, No. 8683).

Literally, *laghw* can be translated as foolish talk, nonsense, null, nugatory, ineffectual, mistake, blunder and ungrammatical language (Hans Wehr 1980, p. 870). However, going deeper and into the science of *tazkiyyah* (purification of the soul), leaving *laghw* is associated with anything that will keep a Muslim away from becoming closer to Allah. That includes vain talk, vain actions, watching unlawful movies, listening to unlawful music, reading sexually explicit literature, gossiping and listening to gossip, spending hours on playing videogames, overeating, oversleeping and the like. However, *laghw* is not necessarily sinful.[1] In this sense, avoiding *laghw* is an important Islamic concept in the forming and building of good character and in making a Muslim more pleasing to

---

[1] The broader understanding of *laghw* used in this article is mainly inspired by Shaykh Mufti Kamaluddin Ahmed who is a contemporary Muslim scholar and academic.

the Creator. Nowadays, *laghw* is everywhere and Muslims engage in it on a large scale.

The verses from the Qur'an and the exemplary Hadith mentioned above show clearly the importance of avoiding *laghw*. Since *laghw* has penetrated in every aspect of our modern life(style), it is necessary to conceptualize the idea of avoiding *laghw* within a broader framework. And to develop this concept to include it in human science and in our theoretical and methodological frameworks. The main question that arises is: How can we include the concept of avoiding *laghw* in human sciences in order to continue the project of building good character in people? This question is not so much about raising awareness of people to do less *laghw* but to innovate mechanisms from within human sciences that help people to avoid *laghw*. Following, I introduce initial ideas that need to be developed further. I wrote this short academic note with the hope to inspire other academics and researchers to include the concept of avoiding *laghw* in their respective fields.

An Avoiding *Laghw* Inspired Search Engine

Learning computer science should not exclude the Islamic worldview. When I asked my students how we can adapt computer science to the Islamic worldview, they looked at me with blank faces. One even commented that computer science is somehow neutral and there is nothing such as Islamic or Islamized computer science. His comment showed the extend and complexity of secularism's penetration into our society. Of course, it is not enough to re-name a program with a Muslim name to Islamize it. We have to integrate our very Islamic values into the computer science. One way of doing that is by designing a search engine that automatically excludes anything and everything that is *laghw* and that therefore poses a hindrance to the internet user of drawing closer to his/her Creator. This can be done on various scales and levels depending on the intended outcome. A search engine programmed to exclude anything that can be considered as *laghw*, is able to contribute to a more Islamic society and to a more Islamic upbringing of our children. Pornography, unpleasant pictures and the like will not even feature in the search results. This way it can become easier to protect our gazes, thoughts, and focuses to become more beloved to Allah. Becoming more beloved to Allah includes becoming a more ethical person and following Allah's rules and regulations. If we become more ethical, we will be able to contribute to the building of a harmonious, tolerant and ethical society. The idea of an avoiding *laghw* inspired search engine can be extended to an

internet browser that avoids anything considered *laghw*. It is even possible to set up a whole computer system in that manner.

Avoiding *Laghw* in Classroom Management

The concept of avoiding *laghw* is essential for the study of education. Teaching Muslim children, it is essential to instill in them a dislike for *laghw*. In the classroom, *laghw* can be any vain or unpleasant talk or words that disrupt the normal order of the classroom and/ or that are expressed to hurt other students or the instructor. Name calling and dissing have become normal even amongst Muslim majority students. Children express the words they are being called at home or which they hear in the media. It is essential that the instructor raises awareness about the *laghw* expressions so that students refrain from engaging in this kind of talk. This is true for all ages and should continue up to the university level with different methods and levels of instructions. Even making an unpleasant facial expression towards the lecturer is counter-productive in the learning process and falls under the category of *laghw*. As much as we have to integrate the remembrance of Allah in our classroom (Areej Ghazi 2012), we have to inculcate the correct understanding of *laghw* and have to aim to exclude it from our classroom. It has to be remembered that, of course, the instructor has to be the role model and be the first person to abandon any type of vain talk and expressions.

Avoiding *Laghw* in Consumer Behavior

The Islamic concept of avoiding or leaving *laghw* can form the base of a new way of thinking about economy and especially about consumer behavior. It is necessary for the betterment of the Muslim communities that we move away from the consumerism and materialism of the modern world. The capitalist establishment has been influencing the Muslim world and its adoption is partly responsible for the decline of the Muslim *ummah*. Too much and unnecessary consuming, which can also be considered as *laghw*, harms Muslims' relationship with Allah. Furthermore, consuming extensively is a threat to the social harmony of our societies. Broadly speaking, today's humanity seems to define itself over material success. However, is it really necessary to have a new car every three to five years or to own more than two, three, four cars? Is it necessary to buy expensive designer cloth, travel extensively for no other reason than enjoyment, and buy luxury products? From the viewpoint of the Islamic worldview, we will be held responsible for this kind of spending.

This kind of excessive spending and consuming is a form of *laghw*. It draws us away from our true purpose of life, which is worshipping Almighty Allah. (Surah Adh-Dhariyat (51), Verse 56) Furthermore, this excessive spending often serves the purpose to cover the void and emptiness inside the consumer. By consuming excessively, humans aim to fill the emptiness inside that emerges because of the distance from the Creator. We try to fill our spiritual emptiness. However, excessive spending and consumption will do the exact opposite. It will increase the distance from our Creator.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop an anti-*laghw* consumer behavior and an anti-*laghw* economy. We have to focus again on establishing Islamic foundations (sing. *waqf*/ pl. *awqaf*) and invest our money in beneficial ways. It is our responsibility as individual Muslims and as a Muslim community to benefit the poor and the deprived in any way possible; by establishing schools, hospitals, and other public services (Thamina Anwar 2017). Instead of spending our money on *laghw* things and making money spending a form of *laghw*, we should invest it in proper and appropriate ways. Here, our Muslim academic scholars from the field of economics need to develop a theoretical framework based on the Islamic free market, *waqf*, controlled consumer behavior and avoiding *laghw*, in order to benefit Muslim societies and individuals.

Avoiding *Laghw* in Research

Concerning avoiding *laghw* in research, it is essential to focus on academic research for topics that can contribute to the betterment of society and to a harmonious, socially balanced society in general. Through our research we should educate society. In addition, as Muslim researchers and academics our work and research is a form of worship (*ibadah*) and therefore it has the intrinsic ability to help us become closer to the Creator (Seise 2019). If we take our research as a form of *ibadah*, it is necessary to leave any research and research practices that are possibly displeasing to Allah. Therefore, leaving *laghw* in research has to be incorporated into an Islamic code of ethics for conducting research in all fields of human sciences.

Conclusion

The Islamic concept of leaving *laghw* is essential in understanding our identity as Muslims. It is part and parcel of our Islamic worldview. Leaving not only forbidden (*haram*) things but also leaving anything that can possibly hurt our relationship with our Master and Cre-

ator is essential to inculcate in our everyday life, if we aim to build again our Islamic civilization. In order to achieve that, it is necessary to return to the concepts and ideas introduced to us in Qur'an, Sunnah and through our rightly guided traditional Islamic scholars. It is our task to revisit these concepts and include them in our modern human sciences. Avoiding *laghw* forms one of these concepts that can enrich our modern human sciences in a positive, thought provoking and substantial way. It is my humble hope that the ideas introduced in this short article can be an inspiration for Muslim academic scholars to develop further the concept of leaving *laghw* for their respective academic fields. I am currently planning to develop the concept of avoiding *laghw* further by undertaking research on how it can be integrated into human sciences. Together with experts from different fields, I would like to develop this concept in depth and generate more ideas on how and where to apply it in human sciences and beyond.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abu Sulayman, Abdulhamid. The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform. London, Washington: IIIT, 2011.

Al-Attas, Naqib. The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999.

Anwar, Thamina. Waqf (Endowment): A Vehicle for Islamic Social Entrepreneurship. Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2017.

Bakar, Osman. Islamic Civilization and The Modern World: Thematic Essays. Brunei: UBD Press, 2014.

Berghout, Abdelaziz (ed). Introduction to the Islamic Worldview: Study of Selected Essentials. Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, Malaysia, 2009.

Berghout, Abdulaziz. "Understanding Worldview: Islamic Perspective". The Islamic Worldview: Selected Essays. Malaysia: IIIT & IIUM (2017), 3-51.

Ghazi, Areej. How to Integrate the Remembrance of God into Teaching. MABDA - English Monograph Series No. 22. Jordan. www.rissc.jo/, 2012.

Hassan, Kamal. Islamization of human Knowledge. In: *Islamic economics education in Southeast Asian universities.* Barom et al (Ed.). Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Islamic Economics. (2013). 13-51.

Seise, Claudia. "The Muslim Researcher: Reflections on Insider/ Outsider Research in Indonesia". *Journal of Islam in Asia* 16 (2019). 297-324.